

INNIS HERALD

MONTHLY FIELD REPORT. VOLUME XLIV., NO. 1., SEPTEMBER 2008.

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Inniscollege

Toronto

ERSTE AUSGABE



THE
INNIS HERALD
WWW.INNISHERALD.COM

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MASTHEAD

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PRÉCIS

& « the of concessions have made » (p. 2-3).

& « I doubt his Cantonese dialogue was exactly realistic either » (p. 4).

& « Although things have been previously discussed by important thinkers... » (p. 5).

& « I like mentioning the Newsboy Legion as a point of comparison, but sans the untutored displays of altruism, or the gimcrack ride » (p. 8-9).

& « Before being too hasty, it might be worth considering that this is a part of the film's overall mediocrity project » (p. 9).

& « It is important to clarify that I am neither—at this particular point—highlighting Shklovsky's notorious notion of defamiliarization, nor am I aligning myself with the obvious value judgment of what art should be or do » (p. 8).

NOTES

Cover artwork an homage to Hans Neuburg's cover to a SWB ausstellung catalogue from 1950. More can be found on wiedler.ch/Book/Design/Stories.

Our first general meeting of the year will be held in the second full week of October. Our website will be updated shortly with the specific date.

The Innis Herald is usually published during the third full week of each month during the Fall and Winter terms. Meeting dates and deadlines may be found on our website.

All submissions are welcome.

A Note from the Editors

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A photograph from the Regine Schumann exhibition ...and then there was light, opening Saturday, October 4th at the Galerie Lausberg (880 Queen St. West). The exhibition runs until Monday, November 3rd and its opening coincides with a site-specific installation for Nuit Blanche in Trinity Bellwoods Park titled *Glow Worms*. More information can be obtained at www.galerie-lausberg.com.



In Defense of *My Blueberry Nights*

I think the key shot of Wong Kar Wai's *My Blueberry Nights* comes very early on. Norah Jones is lying asleep in a Soho coffee shop, her head resting against the counter. Wong closes in for a lingering, soft-focus shot of her face. She is beautiful, and her beauty intoxicates Wong's camera, but Wong makes a crucial decision: there is some vanilla from her latte on her upper lip and nose. Freeing Jones from her uber-famous public image, Wong's camera invites us to appreciate her as not an international star, but a really beautiful human being. *My Blueberry Nights*, which is a very good Wong Kar Wai movie, is masterful in the almost subliminal way it evokes in its audience the feelings of love, longing, and melancholy experienced by its characters.

I said that *My Blueberry Nights* is a very good movie, but perhaps that's not what you've heard. Of all living directors, there is almost nobody I admire more than Wong, whose Hong Kong-made films (including *2046*, *In the Mood for Love*, and *Chungking Express*) are beautifully filmed and emotionally rich mood pieces. He has made around a half dozen of the finest films ever made in any language and has won a shelf full of international awards, but when *My Blueberry Nights* premiered as the opening night film in 2007's Cannes Film Festival it met with critical scorn. Almost a full year later it finally opened in North America, given a halfhearted release and trimmed by 20 minutes (the extended version is playing in other territories, but has unfortunately not been included on the recently-released DVD). With the tone set at Cannes, few critics found anything nice to say about it.

Critical jeers aside, walking into *My Blueberry Nights* I feared that Wong may have already taken his distinctive style as far as it could go with the ambitious *2046*, which Wong described as a « summation » of his work. And how would he survive the trip over the Pacific? Many critics complained that Wong has a tin ear for English dialogue. Well, surprise: *My Blueberry Nights* is a wonderful film, and one that confirms my belief that Wong is one of the contemporary giants of cinema.

Norah Jones, in her acting debut, plays Elizabeth, a heartbroken woman (there seem to be no other kind in Wong's world) who finds herself in a café in New York City's Soho district. She strikes up a friendship with the owner, a British expatriate named Jeremy (Jude Law), and is soon making frequent visits, always at closing time, to talk to Jeremy and eat a piece of blueberry pie, the only one

of Jeremy's pastries that is never sold out. Jeremy, also suffering from a broken heart, secretly longs for Elizabeth, and Elizabeth apparently had feelings for Jeremy, yet without warning, she leaves New York to embark on a meandering, soul-searching journey.

The second act is set in Memphis where Elizabeth works two jobs: a family restaurant by day, a seamy bar by night. At the bar she meets Arnie (David Strathairn), a middle-aged drunkard perpetually celebrating « his last day of drinking » and pining for his wife, Sue Lynne (Rachel Weisz), who has left him. In the third act Elizabeth befriends professional poker player Leslie (Natalie Portman). Leslie learns that her father is on his deathbed in Las Vegas, and with considerable reluctance, she and Elizabeth travel to meet him, although Leslie's relationship with her father has been nonexistent for years. Throughout her odyssey, Elizabeth continues writing postcards to Jeremy, who desperately wants to see her again.

Some critics have said that Wong's English dialogue is stilted. It's certainly not the sort of pseudo-naturalistic talking you'd find in most mainstream movies, but then, I doubt his Cantonese dialogue was exactly realistic either. Wong's dialogue is mannered and stylized, but I found it poetic and quite beautiful. The style of dialogue is consistent among most of the characters and seems appropriate within the film's dreamy milieu. Critics have also complained that Wong's depiction of New York is out of touch with reality, however, this seems to be his intent. Wong's versions of New York, Connecticut, Las Vegas, and the Arizona desert are heavily romanticized versions of their real-life counterparts, as if he was trying to visualize these places not as they actually are, but how we like to perceive and remember them. Jeremy's café and the surrounding streets, drenched in neon and existing in a perpetual haze of glamorous cigarette smoke, are particularly beautiful.

Wong is a renowned visual stylist whose films are notable for their rich use of colour. After years of collaborating with cinematographer Christopher Doyle, here Wong works for the first time with Darius Khondji (*Se7en*, *Funny Games*), and the transition is barely noticeable. Neon blues and greens dominate Khondji's visual strategy in the Soho sections, and luscious reds in the Memphis scenes. His frequent use of close-ups and step-framing (a favourite device of Wong's) make this one of Wong's most beautiful films, and one of his most visually intimate. Wong

and Khondji's visual strategy includes long, lingering shots of their attractive cast's faces. During one such scene, I realized that Wong uses so many close-ups because he wants his audience to feel love for his characters – not lust, but love. One of the film's few defenders, Mike Lasalle of the *San Francisco Chronicle* wrote perceptively, « [Wong is] committed to replicating, in visual terms, what it's like to feel passion. Wong invites you to fall in love, not with a particular woman, but with love itself and with a specific moment in time ».

Elizabeth exists less as a full-fledged character than as a catalyst for the action. Norah Jones is admittedly not a virtuoso, and her role is the least developed of the central characters, but she is competent and likeable. The other leading actors – Jude Law, David Strathairn, Rachel Weisz, and Natalie Portman – fit perfectly within the context of the Wong Kar Wai universe. Strathairn is particularly good; his low-key delivery and slightly nasal voice, combined with the weathered details of his face, hint at a character whose stoic exterior hides an ocean of sadness.

If *2046* was the summation of Wong's career maybe he intended *My Blueberry Nights* as a vehicle to introduce his career to a broader international audience. Devotees of his work will enjoy sporting references to his past films. A harmonica version of the *In the Mood for Love* theme music plays over one scene; Portman's card shark appears to be an American version of Gong Li's character from *2046* and I think the final scene owes a lot to the conclusion of *Chungking Express*; perhaps the blueberry pies are stand-ins for the pineapple cans of *Express*.

But despite these references, *My Blueberry Nights* may be Wong's most accessible film to date. What Wong has done is taken his signature style, which over the years I think has become more rich and evocative, and transplanted it into an American setting with very little change—I was surprised how well it worked. Critics who chastise Wong for not conforming to some unwritten rules of how American films are supposed to be made are missing out by refusing to embrace the beautiful, self-contained, and completely unique universe that Wong has created in other films and continues to explore here. *My Blueberry Nights* probably isn't on the top-shelf of the Wong Kar Wai filmography, but I can't understand why anyone who has appreciated Wong's work in the past could fail to enjoy it.

WILL SLOAN

Things

WITHIN the past 5 or 6 years there has been an increase in publications that are associated with the analysis of things—physical objects—in poetry and fiction, which is often referred to as « object studies ». Although this may sound rather banal or rudimentary, thing-theory is a fascinating discourse that provides an idiosyncratic methodology for illuminating works due to its meticulous attention to the perception, representation, and role of things in relation to the subject-object dynamic. As Merleau-Ponty states, « [t]he thing is inseparable from a person perceiving it, and can never be actually in itself because its articulations are those of our very existence [...] every perception is a communion or a communion ».

Although things have been previously discussed by important thinkers like Baudrillard, Heidegger, Lacan, Sartre, and Žižek, many of these theoretical superheroes address them in a more indirect manner. Works like Bill Brown's *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (2003), Gerald L. Bruns' *The Material of Poetry: Sketches for a Philosophical Poetics* (2005), and Peter Schwenger's *The Tears of Things: Melancholy and Physical Objects* (2006) constitute a more direct renaissance of materiality that is more than just an homage, which subsequently offers specific paradigms that significantly alter reading practices insofar as they nuance our conceptions of materialist culture in a literary context. For instance, thing-theory delves into such ideas as collecting, metonymy, melancholy, gifts, and details. Moreover, these ideas tailor to works such as James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, Frank O'Hara's *Lunch Poems*, Elizabeth Bishop's *Geography III*, Pablo Neruda's *Odes to Common Things*, and Don DeLillo's *White Noise*. I would like to briefly discuss the aforementioned contemporary thing-theory oriented works in order to briefly introduce the nascent stages of a blossoming field.

Brown's *A Sense of Things* is an intelligently penned work that explores « the idea of the idea in things », which entails scrutinizing the impact that things have on the history of human-being. *A Sense of Things* is devoted to a historically specific modernist question—« the question of things and their thingness »—in a period wherein works of art did not actively engage in or seriously consider thingness. Brown's work is relatively quotidian insofar as he is more than capable of clearly stating his intimations and methodologies; this is especially helpful for the uninformed reader encountering thing-theory for the first time. For instance, Brown posits two simple, underlying questions that constitute the foundation of his study: « [h]ow are objects represented in

this text? And how are they made to mean? ». *A Sense of Things* is a noteworthy and highly influential work within the context of thing-theory; it warrants a considerable degree of attention for those interested in learning more about object studies.

Brun's *The Material of Poetry* offers an excellent analysis of poetry vis à vis the notion that « poetry is made of things ». At a fundamental level, then, this raises the question of how to conceive the relationship between words and things, which is not simply an affinity based on « mediation ». Rather, according to Brun, it is only at the level of words' materiality that they connect to things, which is—at least for me—an impasse because I have issues with getting past the fact that words still represent physical objects regardless of their iconic or indexical value. Barring all quibbles, however, Brun's *The Material of Poetry* is an insightful, thought-provoking work that significantly contributes to thing-theory.

Schwenger's *The Tears of Things* provides an insightful analysis of the melancholy of things that chalks up to be much more than just the typical lamentation associated with ephemeral objects. Drawing upon (and subsequently nuancing) Freud's « Mourning and Melancholy », Schwenger offers the reader a theoretically challenging work that pays off in the end. Schwenger's subtle, seemingly meticulous postulations substantially construct an integral addendum to object studies insofar as he tracks the way in which the subject will always respond with a melancholy that is « felt by the subject and is ultimately for the subject ». Moreover, Schwenger draws upon literary and non-literary writers in order to elucidate his hypotheses, which results in a work that offers a myriad of entry points for readers that might have differing research interests. *The Tears of Things* is a more than adequate theoretical endeavour that expands an area of thing-theory previously left untouched.

As a way of demonstrating an analysis that falls within the mandate of thing-theory, I would like to offer an excerpt from a larger work in progress that looks at Frank O'Hara's « For the Chinese New Year & Bill Berkson » in relation to things and other satellite concepts.

« For the Chinese » demonstrates two types of pollution-in-process that are observable in the following quotation:

the inscrutable passage of a lawn-mower
punctuates
the newly installed Muzack in the
Shubert Theatre

am I nuts or is this the happiest moment of my life

It is important to first denote « inscrutable » as something « that cannot be searched into or found out by something; impenetrable or unfathomable to investigation; quite unintelligible, entirely mysterious » (OED) because this analysis hinges on these attributes. Firstly, then, the lawn-mower exemplifies contradictoriness by the presence of a seemingly non-present thing. More specifically, the absent lawn-mower actually has the ability to « punctuate » the Muzack system; put differently, an absent thing is contradictorily made present vis à vis its interaction with a present thing. This scene of pollution-in-process produces thing-pollution—the irreconcilability between an absent and present thing—that constitutes the anxiety of things, which the ungarded self experiences. Evidence of the chameleonic-like process involves the fact that the speaker's level of sanity is both affirmed and called into question: the speaker is able to discern the sounds of the lawn mower and asks, « am I nuts ». Secondly, the interpenetration of noise and music—the « punctual[ing] » of one wavelength by another—exemplifies pollution-in-process characterized by excessiveness; this scene emits thing-pollution that constitutes a redundancy, which feeds into the anxiety of things.

I recommend looking into one or more of the three aforementioned theoretical works if you are at all interested in pursuing an alternate methodological approach. As well, if you are merely looking for a sobering experience, one that might shake your preconceptions of what constitutes theory, seriously consider thinking and reading about things. Again, Merleau-Ponty emphasizes the ontological, undeniable significance of things relative to our everyday perceptions: « [t]hat is why we say that in perception the thing is given to us in person, or in the flesh. Prior to and independently of other people, the thing achieves that miracle of expression: an inner reality which reveals itself externally, a significance which descends into the world and begins its existence there, and which can be fully understood only when the eyes seek it in its own location ».

MICHAEL SLOANE







This page features four pieces by Michael Ricks. They are entitled (clockwise): *Genesis I: Flesh and Blood*, *Bone and Ink*, *Adam and Eve*, *Samekh*, and *Yav*. The pieces are part of Gallery 533's (533 Richmond St. West) exhibition *Michael Ricks: The Written*, which runs until Thursday, October 9th. More information may be found at www.gallery533.ca



On Sous

« Montagnes pas zoine. Dimoune zoine ».
- Sergeant, Gros Bois Mash-Up, 1972

MY father used to run around in the mid-sixties with a group of hustling street toughs called the « Sous Gang », a name whose derivation has been variously attributed a posteriori to things like their alleged practice of sooging catamarans clean-clear of dead fish caught with panty-hose trawl-nets tied to their toes (though one enthusiastic account related the name to the phrase, « *ton enne sou inne vinne cinq sous* » – a veiled reference, if anything ever involved identifying sodomites based on their resemblance to dimensions of the coinage in circulation, and which by 1966 Mauritian mint standards is saying something). These were young, damed-if-you-did-damed-if-you-don't kids, souls a-whoopie behind the pinprick embrasures of their coconut-studded headquarters, a chiselled-hollow Tin Lizzie abandoned behind a walled-up junkyard on La Rue Royal, armed to the teeth with stale candies launched by katty, trained in psychonautical autocombat, fingernails cut to look like mountain points. Jollies included swapping town drunk gaspers with firecrackers, a glory-hole racket where two hundred rupees got you a diarrhetic dog's ass, or worse, a razorblade joy buzzer handjob, and leaping off Montagne Desiginaux with a host of flapping chickens tied about their arms.

I like mentioning the Newsboy Legion as a point of comparison, but sans the unctuous displays of altruism, or the gimcrack ride – the Sousses' Whiz Wagon was really a rusting metal chariot drawn by alternating members of the gang tethered together by rayon thread, chicken-wire, and sheets of tinfoil. It's funny, they used to draw lots with caterpillar cocoons – the one closest to a butterfly got to be Ben-Hur (or Jimmy Olsen, depending on the day). These poaching, curb-hugging latter-day Apaches, according to their biographies in the *Serviette Mouillée* (a patchwork dossier started by the « Zazat Drug Patrol », which slowly made the rounds to other gangs when stolen, growing exponentially in size by the additions and emendations the current possessors saw fit to include) were comprised of:

ServMo.On Sous 1.1.Zoot: « *a pas conne so manière, li contentousse femme so camarade et lere banne-la guette so femme li enragé couma li chien, ça gogotte la, zo l'ombri pas encore sec, li rode faire l'amour* » – Ti Zomme, « Gurdy Boys », 1968

Set straight: from Lourdes, born 1955 as François Martineau, Eugen Sandow look-alike. Never revealed to Mauritian Sousses how ended up on island (got it from Ehsan that his folks may have been diplomats); name has nothing to do with the suits, but referred to defective radio kept in pocket that would « zoot » instead of get staticky. Ambled up David St. one day looking for place that sold rock maria. Sousses

spotted him, took him in because imposing figure proved expedient in scaring other children at pastry shop into coughing up cakes, spare change, and occasionally clean underwear.

ServMo.On Sous 1.2.Fou: « *sa couillon la enne grand menteur, li content sali nom dimoune ça mème qui banne-la finne cache so la guelle, li enne mangeur ti-garçon* » – Zozo Mort, « Zazat Drug Patrol », 1970

Set straight: born Ehsan Olyuar, date ????, laughs like sandpaper scraping against a mother's wart-riddled back, first to grow facial hair (first to lose it elsewhere too), most congenial of rollicking pipsqueaks, and also first to get wise to diminishing prospects of staying in neighbourhood gang in increasingly modern (and terrifying) world. The scoundrels generally begin to realize they can trust no one but themselves after creation of Rat Gallows Way (Not real gallows. Judas Cradle in middle of causeway). Not to say Fou couldn't hack it – once held down six « Gurdy Boys » with spare tire and wits alone 'til pop arrived with dead chicken, box of Q-tips, and flame-top headband to really leg into them – but he certainly doesn't stick around for « *wilderness years* » (designation: mine – carly to mid seventies, times of great misfortune: Sousses film Dop-Dop-Dop Shampoo commercial, form proto-punk band *Les Ourites*, and even catch entrepreneurial bug, patenting brand of liquid paper – *Sous-Away*).

ServMo.On Sous 1.3.Piomlo: « *sa gogotte la enne grand voleur, jamais li travail, cotte to croire li gagne casse pour li habille coum ça, li enne bourrique, li conne ziste coquin, mangé, divertir, caaa* » – Kon Konné, « Souillac Salamanders », 1969

Set straight: born 1962 as Benoit Christopher, scamp, doubling as choryphaeus when necessary during scuffles. Cabbies knew him as « *Missié Bonheur-Bonheur* » because inveigled them to pick him up early when bunking off from school with promises of schoolmarm's phone number (matched up pair, Ti-Pourri – lit-

crally « *small-rotten* » – and Linda, ironically my Godparents).

ServMo.On Sous 1.4.Sergeant: « *zotte couma di sel quand la pluie tombe zotte bisin alle cabbiette, zotte pas pour fondre !* » – Cochon, « Boater Hat Bumblebees » 1965

Set straight: most refractory member of gang, my father, born 1954/1955/1959 depending on the birth certificate at hand. Ruled with pint-sized iron fist and reviled when not feared by other boys on street additionally because of loose hood of skin in back of head revealed by life-long though by no means consistent cases of alopecia, giving new dimension of forcefulness to claim of back-of-head eye possession. Obsessed with Dead End Kids, cleared hundred mark in watching *Angels with Dirty Faces* at fifteen. « *Whadda ya hear ? Whadda ya say ?* » I often hear rising to fever pitch from throne. Hear it so much I even design a thread-bare mandala inspired by it to be worn by members of my first street gang, *The Boom Tube Kids* (one part Teddy Boys, two parts Fourth World). Interesting aside: father in such a tizzy over ServMo entry by Cochon that he labours for three weeks on Tijuana Bibles involving Cochon and his mother; subsequently mails out copies to Cochon's parents, peers, teachers; places several editions in newsstand periodicals across town.

Getting away from the *Serviette Mouillée*, the Sous Gang's last streak-of-spit adventure of belly-tickling action took place on January 28th, 1972, referred to by those present as the Gros Bois Mash-Up of 1972. In attendance were incarnations of the Gurdy Boys, with their weaponized organistrums and gilt ribbon bars; the Sous Gang, assembled on the back of a twelve-foot sugar-Golem, armoured with mouse-trap chest-plates and canine-skull helmets; the Boater Hat Bumblebees, standing at parade rest with their puce-coloured baldries slung like impudent foreskins, their battle-drawn peltarions obscuring their bodies; the Zazat Drug Patrol, who had arrived by cartwheel, prepared with nothing but vials filled with a chunky, yagé-like brew to be guzzled at the mash-up's designated breaks.

The melee was fortuitously captured on film by Ehsan on his Super-8 – who had already left the Sousses at this point – and though I have seen the footage, I still reserve judgment on what the film actually depicts for some time in the distant future when I am able to survey the remaining members of the Sousses, to appropriately question more of the other gangs who are not averse to the idea of my meeting them given the pedigree to which I belong, and when I am not under such considerable pressure as I am now from my father to conclude with the momentum of a religious fiat the hypostasis structuring the event. It need only be said that somewhere between Sergeant carving his name into Cochon's temples with his fingers and Zozo Mort overdosing by a street lamp, the ground on which they stood collapses, shattered concrete disappearing into the blackened abyss – « *Shades of unholy Tartarus !* » testimony states someone cried (probably Piomlo). Then, the rising posi-



Sergeant's Profile in the *Serviette Mouillée*, pg. 43. Primary Source.

tronic crackle of orbiting miasmata, rushing forth around a bulbous golden yolk gaining in size and dimension, itself engorged with the home-cooked fare of spiralling torsos falling through its veiny, dilate membrane (all of the Gurdy Boys, nine Zazats, half of the Boaters) – dangling from a halved drainage pipe, emptying feces, urine, and prophylactics into their faces, first Cochon, and not far behind, clasped around his pant leg, my father. Cochon advises Sergeant to climb up so they can both escape; my father skirts up Cochon's limp body, pulls himself to safety, and looking down at the cracked, already shit-smearing face of his enemy, turns about-face, and pulls down his trousers. Bending over to expel the contents of his breakfast (three pints of aloude, a handful of gateau piments, and a pound of dohl puri), Cochon tumbles from the weight into the growing blot in the ground. Its features no longer masked, indistinct, the rising orb of digested children climbs northward flooding the edges of the chasm, the curvature of the mouth

and contours of the eyes revealing the squirming countenance of that which is unmistakably my own.

My father mouths the words, « *Montagnes pas zaine. Dimonne zaine* », in the soundless footage. The orb swells and alights from its cavernous quarters, following the Souscs – who have fallen back to the closed shops surrounding the deserted street – its gargantuan lips possibly repeating, « *En dessous. En dessous. En dessous* ». But then the orb falters, collapses, and begins to fry and sizzle in the noonday sun, its curled, toxic edges folding back to its centre unto itself, the drooping, roiled visage hardening to a pouty fluff. The flat-lining pancake calls out to Sergeant, Zoot, and Piombo by their birth names; they approach, dropping to their knees to listen in earnest to the hyperkinetic eggy argot, the gonzo prophecy of the ovoid-master. « *Sous. Sous. Sous* », it repeats in its weakened state.

What little unfried yolk remains begins to collect about their clothes, moistens,

until the gentle waves of the emulsifying agent finds their way to their loins – « *Sacrédié ! It burns Jean-Marc ! It burns !* » My father agrees in disquiet, hugs his arms around his waist, and curls into a small quid onto the street, waiting to be picked up by the ambulance sirens already piercing the now calming air. Lugged out onto a stretcher, my father tells the ambulance man to wait, reaches on the street to the haggard egg now no larger than his palm, and munches difficultly on the greasy sheet, occasionally fingering out morsels caught between his teeth.

At last, I am born on May 13th, 1987. I have not met Penny Martineau or Alan Christopher, but I am told the resemblance is uncanny.

JEAN MARC AH-SEN

Notes from the Toronto International Film Festival

Disgrace
dir. Steve Jacobs

For a film that Cameron Bailey termed « *courageous* » in his introductory speech, *Disgrace* finds every opportunity to pull punches from the source novel. Before being too hasty, it might be worth considering that this is a part of the film's overall mediocrity project. While performances range from good to acceptable, the best that can be said about the direction is that it was competent enough. In fact, in the first ten minutes there is an obvious formalist approach, where the meaning is just as laughably blunt – the use of focus and dissolves to indicate the ensuing « *clarifying* ». However, this approach is discarded as quickly as the script whips past the novel's first act, indicating that maybe Steve Jacobs was getting as bored with the project as quickly as myself. It is never my wont to solely discuss the script in an adaptation, but that's really the only thing that stands out. Unfortunately, that is for missing the entire purpose of the novel (that Coetzee apparently signed off on the project is mystifying). Apart from dropping every opportunity to economically convey the major language concerns of the novel – and there are some pretty clear opportunities for such a seemingly difficult transposition – the script has a very intriguing way of excising the most important lines within dialogue otherwise present. While there is a definite emphasis on the father-daughter relationship that may initially serve to explain the difference, this aspect, like much of the script, is still hampered by shifting the main character, David, from a self-righteous egoist transformed by disgrace into a self-righteous egoist who is able to suffer disgrace with these character traits in tact. Witness how a novel about checking a classist, colonialistic and heteronormative atti-

tude can be reduced to a series of further condescension towards other classes, races and genders (even while you are in the wrong!). Like a D+ Grade 10 book report, *Disgrace* does its best to summarize most of the plot, but catches little of the meaning.

35 Rhums
dir. Claire Denis

It is fitting that a film about trains and the family life of one of its operators is the subject where Claire Denis, a master of movement, pays homage to Ozu. Her measure is perfect to capture the richness in what might otherwise be termed as simple lives. Here, the smoking of a cigarette is given epic consideration and made compelling by Agnes Godard's (expectedly) expert camera work. Similarly, a late night dance at a closed café is an immensely exciting event, a push and pull of narrative information. The audience understands how the event has come to occur, but the electric energy comes from what is not known: both the ambiguous relationships between characters new and familiar, and the fragmentation that the closeness of the camera provokes. The title's shots of alcohol, like much of the history and culture of the film's Caribbean-descended characters, also plays on this theme: the information of the character's past lives and the story of the 35 shots become mythological as they are acknowledged, but never explained (or exploited) for obvious narrative dividends. Instead, Lionel, who propagates the myth of the 35 shots, solds his daughter for holding on to these nostalgic objects. When she escapes with a letter, which sheds light on at least one relationship in the movie, we realize how quickly the past becomes irrelevant in the fluidity of the present (and especially its relationship with the family),

where trains overrun the old and brand new rice cookers purchased for the family kitchen carry the most symbolic weight.

Les Plages d'Agnès
dir. Agnès Varda

Les Plages d'Agnès is the equivalent to Agnes Varda opening up a scrapbook of her life and describing the contents as you flip through the pages. Juggling different media and strands of post-modern self-reflexivity, Varda undertakes the impossible task of autobiography. This is handled by adjusting the project ever so slightly, as the opening scene on a beach conveys. While the beach is an important locale for Varda, the number of mirrors she has amassed from friends and placed in the sand reflect both her and her collaborators. What the film articulates (and perhaps excavates) is a desire to capture her life alongside those of the people she has met along the way, which has imbued a lifetime of work both on screen and through various installations. In this sense, the filming of her friends filming her describing her life (her art and otherwise) is a fitting mode, with the post-credit portion of the film revealing the difficulty (later expressed by Varda in the Q&A) of determining a conclusion to a work such as this; the presentation of eighty brooms by Varda's friends for her 80th birthday is simply the most recent footage, yet also an explicit acknowledgment of the tension between Varda's age and continuing career. As much as this is a film looking backward, its amiable mix of restlessness and ramshackle improvisation – captured through a number of technologically improving devices – mark the film (and the portrait of Varda) distinctly in the present.

CHRIS HERON

Visual Affect in Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth*: Part I

IN *Visual Intelligence*, Ann Marie Seward Barry discusses the relationship between images and emotions and concludes, based on the fact that « *the image is perceptually processed along the same alternative pathways as direct experience* », « *[t]he image is [...] capable of reaching the emotions before it is cognitively understood* » (78). Barry continues to elucidate the aforementioned relationship by discussing the « *logic of the image* » (78) and contextualizing it in relation to comics, which dovetails quite nicely with my subject matter:

*[t]he logic of the image is also associative and holistic rather than linear, so that not only does the image present itself as reality, but it also may speak directly to the emotions, bypassing logic, and works according to allogical principles of reasoning. When an image is combined with words as in a comic strip, the words become secondary but the language of images remains primary. (78, italics added)*¹

The affective ability of an image is fundamental to my analysis of Chris Ware's *Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth* [JC] because I am focusing on how the inner-workings, interrelations, and presentation of images in JC can emotionally impact the « *interactive participants* » (Kress and van Leeuwen 48).² Prior to specifying exactly what this entails, I want to discuss Victor's Shklovsky's « *Art as Technique* » and Douglas Wolk's *Reading Comics*—specifically the chapter entitled « *Why Does Chris Ware Hate Fun?* »—in order to contextualize my topic.

Shklovsky's discussion of art's *raison d'être* is important because it supports my impetus to scrutinize the visual in JC in relation to affect, to the emotional capabilities of Ware's work. Shklovsky states that,

*[...] art exists [so] that one may recover the sensation of life; it exists to make one feel things, to make the stone *story*. The purpose of art is to impart the sensation of things as they are perceived and not as they are known. The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,' to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged. Art is a way of experiencing the artfulness of an object; the object is not important. (italics in original)*

It is important to clarify that I am neither—at this particular point—highlighting Shklovsky's notorious notion of defamiliarization, nor am I aligning myself with the obvious value judgment of what art should be or do; rather, I want to underscore the notion of «

artfulness » because it helps to accentuate the importance of the overall execution and presentation of a work and how it can produce sensations or feelings that are subsequently experienced by the interactive participants. Moreover, the idea of artfulness foregrounds the notion of style, which provides me with an avenue to delve into the micro and macro levels of Ware's idiosyncratic style. On the one hand, then, focusing on the micro level of Ware's style involves such things as the meticulously crafted lines of his cartooning; this is important for evaluating style because, as Wolk notes, « *[t]he cartoonist's line defines the shape of the comics image, but it's never just a border: it's a signature, or rather a marking of territory as the artist's* » (123, emphasis added). Furthermore, Wolk states that

[t]he line itself is an interpolation, something the cartoonist adds to his or her idea of the shape of bodies in space. In a cartoon, every object's form is subject to interpretive distortion — even when what's being distorted isn't a real image but a distant cousin of something real. A consistent, aestheticized distortion, combined with the line that establishes that distortion, adds up to a cartoonist's visual style, no matter how intentional or unintentional it is. (123)

The micro level of Ware's style has an « *aestheticized distortion* » that is undeniably his own and immensely rich with signification; Wolk attests to this when he notes that Ware « *can convey a mountain of information with two or three lines* » (350).

On the other hand, focusing on the macro level of Ware's style involves such things as the composition of the content inside the panels in JC with reference to such compositional concepts as information value, salience, and framing (Kress and van Leeuwen 177 ff) and other ideas such as braiding, *à la* Groensteen (142–43). By paying close attention to Ware's artfulness and scrutinizing *what* he does and *how* he does it by focusing on the micro and macro levels of his style, I will be able to evaluate the image-emotion relationship in JC, a phenomenon that I would like to refer to as the *visual affect*—an expression that will become more clear throughout this exposition.

It should also be noted that this style-driven analysis of JC coincides with Wolk's emphasis on the « *style-first mandate* » in art comics insofar as the primary value for the readers of art comics is « *at the work of their creators' hands* » (31). Wolk's emphasis on style in art comics leads him to assert that « *comics produced under the sole or chief creative control of a single person of significant skill are more likely to be good (or at least novel enough*

to be compelling and resonant) than comics produced by a group of people assembly-line style » (31). Aside from his rather blatant value judgment, Wolk's suggestion that art comics have the ability to be « *compelling* » and « *resonant* » indexes, to a certain extent, the image-emotion relationship that I am addressing in JC because an artist's style will affect—in some way, shape, or form—the interactive participants. As well, Wolk happens to demarcate Ware's style relative to the « *assembly-line style* » by noting that his style « *had nothing to do with the default style of the mainstream comics — it was and still is symbolic and iconic, with only the faintest nod to realism or thrills or sexiness, and deliberate in a way that doesn't permit any accidents of composition or linework* » (54). It is worth highlighting the idiosyncratic nature of Ware's style because these « *thrills* » are related to my analysis of visual affect in JC.

Before moving on to a discussion of Wolk's chapter on Ware and using it as a springboard for stating my argument, it is important to address one foreseeable complication in regards to an application of Shklovsky's ideas to Ware's JC because, as previously noted, I intend to raise the notion of defamiliarization in relation to the visual in JC, and therefore need to explain and clarify my approach.

The complication specifically involves the idea that Ware's cartooning style—i.e. how it reads—is antithetical to the process of defamiliarization; this claim invalidates—or at least obfuscates—any later discussion of defamiliarization relative to the visual in JC. More specifically, this complication is based on a dissonance produced by what Wolk says about Ware and what Shklovsky says about defamiliarization: Wolk states that Ware's definition of comics as a « *pictographic language* » entails that « *they're meant to be read fast* » and that « *Ware's pages zoom along* » because they are « *[d]ominated by simple shapes and dead, fixed-width lines* » (355, italics in original)³ and Shklovsky points out that, « *[a] work is created 'artistically' so that its perception is impeded and the greatest possible effect is produced through the slowness of the perception* » (italics added). Thus there is a dissonance between the « *fast* »-ness associated with Ware's style and the « *slowness* » inherent in the process of defamiliarization. Granted Wolk concedes when he notes how Ware's work is « *slowed down only by tricky diagrammatic layouts and occasional indigestible blocks of tiny type* » (355); however, the noted dissonance still needs to be addressed for the sake of validating my analysis of defamiliarization in JC. ■

Footnotes available online.

MICHAEL SLOANE



Swamp Edge is included in the exhibition *Wetlands*, showcasing the work of Frances Cockburn. The exhibition runs from Thursday, October 9th until Wednesday, November 12th at Gallery 533 (533 Richmond St. West). More information may be found at www.gallery533.ca

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